

Pandemic pushes Turkish medical textile good exports over \$1B threshold

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Workers at a factory produce masks in Izmir, western Turkey, Nov. 30, 2020. (AA Photo)

Exports of Turkish medical textile goods registered a significant increase from January through October this year, data showed Monday, as strong demand and capacity increase worked in Turkey's favor.

Foreign sales of the products hit over \$1 billion (TL 7.8 billion) in the first 10 months of the year, up from only \$50 million a year earlier, the Turkish Exporters' Assembly (TIM) data showed.

Turkish textile manufacturers are said to have adapted rapidly to the pandemic and boosted their capacities to meet the ever-increasing demand.

"We have an average monthly export of almost \$100 million. We anticipate it will continue at this level. The market has now settled down," said Burak Sertbaş, chairperson of the Aegean Ready-To-Wear Clothing and Apparel Exporters' Association.

Most firms turned toward medical textile products such as masks and coveralls, Sertbaş told Anadolu Agency (AA) Monday.

Medical textile goods worth \$95 million were exported in October alone, he added.

Sales were made to 167 countries, with Germany topping the list by receiving \$165 million worth of Turkish goods in the January-October period.

The U.S. came in second with \$160 million, followed by the U.K. and the Netherlands with \$104 million each, the data showed.

Exports to the world's largest medical textile goods exporter, China, reached \$24 million in the 10-month period.

Among others, Spain received around \$49.5 million worth of Turkish medical textile goods. Sales to Italy, France, Canada, Romania and Qatar amounted to some \$44.5 million, \$39 million, \$38.8 million, \$36.9 million and \$28.3 million, respectively.

"Surgical gowns alone held a \$700 million share in exports, and the share of exports of medical masks reached \$173 million," said Sertbaş.

TİM Chairperson İsmail Güle last week said the sales of ventilators surged 565% year-on-year to \$5.6 million in October, up from just \$835,000 a year earlier.

Mask and coverall exports hit \$43.3 million in the month, a 548% year-on-year increase from a year earlier, Güle said. Sales of diagnostic kits also increased to \$8.7 million from \$3.6 million, a 141% year-on-year rise, while exports of disinfectants increased by 32% to \$17.4 million, up from \$13.3 million.

Sertbaş added that the Aegean Exporters' Association (EİB) made \$73 million worth of sales of medical textile products in the 10-month period.

The export figure included \$55 million worth of surgical gowns and medical masks worth \$8 million, he noted.

Sertbaş also pointed to the lack of new orders in the ready-to-wear sector due to COVID-19 concerns.

"There are no sharp cancellations like in March, but no new orders either. We will take orders based on the condition of the outbreak. We will do well by the end of December," he said.

"If the outbreak continues at the start of the new year and the closures begin, we will have a problem," he said.

A firm from the western province of İzmir that manufactures military camouflage products shifted to the production of masks during the pandemic.

Suhuf Textile's sales director, Oktay Gençay, said the company can produce 1.5 million masks daily, stressing the ever-increasing demand from both the domestic market and abroad.

"We export to about 30 countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark. Normally, China was the world's largest producer. European countries, in particular, do not lean toward the masks produced in China. Thus, we have reached the current position where we (Turkey) meet almost 45% of Europe's mask needs," Gençay said.

The second wave of the pandemic has brought a peak in the demand, he noted.

"We export not only to the end-user but also to the health ministries of the countries. The health ministries of France and the U.K. have procured masks from us," Gençay said.